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CHALLENGES TO RECRUITMENT FOR THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT SECTOR



DR SIOBHAN NEARY LOOKS AT THE SHORTAGE OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS

In spring 2018 the Career Development Institute (CDI) together with the International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS) at the University of Derby undertook research with employers in the career development sector to assess current workforce needs. This was prompted by anecdotal evidence suggesting a shortage of careers professionals and challenges to recruitment in many areas of the UK. This research provides a useful temperature gauge of the influence of various government policies on recruitment and retention of careers professionals. It suggests that pay and conditions, geography and access to affordable training are impacting on the skills and capability of the sector.

The research utilised an online survey circulated widely through the networks of the organisations. Responses were received from 59 employing organisations, representing the four countries in the UK. 64% of responses came from larger career providers employing more than 40 staff. The respondents represented employers providing services to young people, adults, all-age, FE and a small number of HE providers. Overall, the companies employed 1275 careers advisers qualified to Level 6 and above, 543 careers assistant level staff qualified at Level 4 and 565 other career development staff. Companies contributing to the survey employed between 1 and 300 careers advisers.

In exploring the characteristics of the workforce, companies were asked to respond to a series of questions with a true, false or true for some response. The questions explored a range of topics including, staff turnover, recruitment and training issues, skills gaps and needs and workforce demographics.

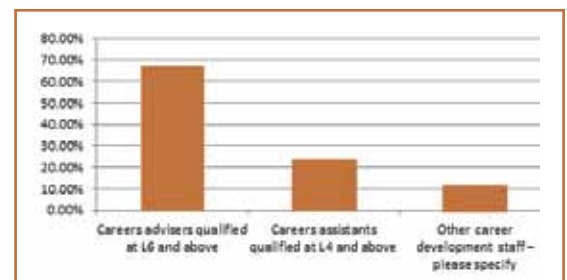
The data suggests that there are many recruitment issues that are affecting employers, but employers are not necessarily all experiencing the same issues in the same way. For many employers (60%) staff turnover either to other employers or leaving the sector was relatively low. Where staff were leaving, this was often due to working with payment by results contracts (PBR), perceived lack of career progression and lack of CPD. However, nearly one quarter of respondents (24.5%) indicated that they have recently made redundancies and were not currently recruiting.

Recruiting new staff

When considering the right skills required for the vacancies they have available, only 17% of companies felt this was not a problem for them, 58% identified there was a shortage and another 24% felt this was the case for some roles.

Technology was one area that employers have concerns with 62% stating they need to upskill people due to changes in technology. Other areas that employers were struggling with were recruiting Level 6 and above qualified staff, with 33% indicating they struggled to recruit to other career development roles as well. Level 6 assessors were identified as a particular shortage area within the sector.

Figure 1: Difficulty in recruiting to job roles



Challenges in recruitment often resulted in elongated periods required to employ new staff. Companies reported that they elicit a significant number of enquiries for their vacancies but potential applicants lack the qualifications and experience necessary. Some have chosen to recruit applicants with generic information, advice and guidance (IAG) skills but these practitioners often lack the careers guidance theory and LMI elements of the role, which limits their competence to deliver personal careers guidance without additional training and qualifications.

Salary and conditions of service

Salary and conditions of service were identified as barriers. Companies stated they lacked funding to be able to provide fully-trained and qualified professionals with the wage that they are expecting.



Smaller companies such as charities confirmed they are not able to compete with FE and Higher Education institutions in terms of salaries. Other conditions of service identified included short-term contracts which were often difficult to recruit to. Companies who delivered large government contracts for example felt these do not enable employers to meet Level 6 and above practitioners' salary expectations.

"We are losing skills from the business due to retirement and staff are leaving for better paid positions working direct for a school, college or HE."

Training and development

Respondents were asked to comment on the availability of training and support for workforce development relating to digital skills, advanced interviewing skills, career management skills, using LMI in guidance, reflective practice, resilience and management and leadership skills. When asked if they have access to all the training and support need to develop a work force in each section it was a varied group of results.

The majority of respondents were able to access training in most of the areas explored, advanced guidance skills was perceived as the hardest topic to access training in, reflective practice was the easiest (78%).

Areas that have found difficulties in accessing training have been in employer brokerage and working with specific client groups such as, highly-qualified customers, migrants, older workers and understanding and supporting disabilities. The challenge for many was finding affordable, local and appropriate qualifications and training for staff at Level 4, 6 and above. Funding continues to be a dominant factor prohibiting access to training, as was location which was frequently commented on.

When considering how they feel about having the right skills now and in the future, the employers gave a mixed response just over half (52%) felt it would be ok for some roles but not for others, 28% felt worried that they would struggle. Some issues were geographically related

such as in Wales with the need to have bilingual staff. Access to training and CPD was identified as problematic and in some companies practitioners were paying for their own training. Employers were often providing all their CPD in house as there was little resource available to buy in external provision.

Issues of an aging workforce

For some employers, there were concerns about not being able to recruit younger people to roles. It was perceived that young and ambitious people could contribute to invigorating the sector. This was allied with an aging workforce in some parts of the sector, 74% of employers had some concerns about this. This was specifically the case when it was a small organisation with only one qualified careers adviser who had been there for years. Being able to replace the level of knowledge and experience was particularly concerning.

Conclusions

The career development sector across the UK has experienced much change over the last decade or so. The provision of services across the four countries is both similar and divergent at the same time. Regardless of the size of the services many struggle with recruitment and are concerned about the skills gaps they are struggling to fill.

Key issues focus on the perceived lack of suitably qualified applicants, issues of geography, aging workforce, knowledge, skills and expertise. Underlying these are issues of pay and conditions which the differentiation in qualification levels appears to have exacerbated.

The higher apprenticeship route is warmly welcomed as it is perceived as answering a number of the issues that have been identified within this research and providing an opportunity for companies to widen their recruitment with younger and more diverse applicants. The research has offered a snapshot of how employers perceive the current and future workforce issues. It will be important to continue to monitor this so that sector has time to respond.

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